Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Transparency

FAO-EU FLEGT PROGRAMME

Success story

Regional: South-South cooperation advances transparency objectives in West and Central Africa

Key facts

Cooperation between national NGOs in West and Central Africa has advanced transparency and legality objectives in the forest sector across the region. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)-European Union (EU) Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Programme has partnered with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to expand Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) activities by promoting regional cooperation. Independent forest observers are now better equipped to monitor the use of forest resources and participate in related decision-making processes.

Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) is a process by which civil society and communities living in and around forests monitor, document and report suspected illegalities in the timber sector in accordance with national laws. The Cameroonian NGO *Forêts et Développement Rural* (FODER) has accumulated over ten years of experience in IFM, reporting on illegalities checked against nationally defined criteria. With support from the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme, FODER developed a national Standardized System of Independent External Monitoring between 2014 and 2017, which is now certified against ISO 9001:2015 international quality standards [1].

Sharing expertise nationally and regionally

Forêts et Développement Rural contributed to national efforts to increase timber legality in Campo Ma'an, Southern Cameroon, by mentoring a local NGO, *Appui pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le Développement* (APED). FODER trained ten APED representatives on how to carry out IFM missions, from the planning to the reporting stages. APED further cascaded the acquired knowledge to nine local forest community members who then conducted five practice IFM missions. Local cooperation crossed the borders into Côte d'Ivoire, where FODER lent its expertise to the *Observatoire Ivoirien pour la Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles* (OI-REN). The organizations jointly trained 35 Ivorian independent forest observers on conducting IFM missions, including on how to operate GPS equipment, create digital maps, collect and analyze data and report on suspected illegalities. Trainees conducted two test IFM missions led by OI-REN to apply the newly acquired skills.

[1] CIDT

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Worked to

advance transparency objectives in West and Central Africa through Independent Forest Monitoring.

Worked for

NGOs, forest administration staff and forest communities.

Worked with

Forests and Rural Development (FODER), the Ivorian Observatory for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (OI-REN), Support for the Protection of the Environment and Development (APED), the Center for Environmental Information and Sustainable Development (CIEDD) and the Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG).

Worked thanks to

the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office of the United Kingdom (FCDO), the European Union (EU) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

Related links

FAO-EU FLEGT Programme

African Platform for Independent Observation

Standardized System of Independent External Monitoring in Cameroon

Open Timber Portal

FODER

APED

FLAG

South-South Cooperation in West and Central Africa virtual map

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Koffi Jean Baptiste, president of a local NGO that runs IFM operations in the region, stated:

> Thanks to the training session and missions, I was able to better understand civil society's role in promoting a surveillance mechanism to halt illicit activity and help loggers work legally and live from their craft.

Expanding IFM to the Central African Republic

Forêts et Développement Rural joined forces with another Cameroonian organization, the *Field Legality Advisory Group* (FLAG), to assist the Central African NGO *Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable* (CIEDD) to establish IFM practices in the country.

While FODER delivered capacity building on organizational aspects and financial management such as the development of a new manual of procedures, FLAG brought technical expertise to plan and guide field missions. Exchanges between civil society and public authorities resulted in the development of a national IFM framework which includes a committee to review and validate reports, composed of VPA stakeholders.

Subsequently, FLAG trained 12 independent forest observers and three forest administration agents on the new national IFM framework and forest sector laws. The Cameroonian NGO shared examples and lessons learned throughout a decade of experience in IFM at the training sessions. Through two practice missions accompanied by FLAG, CIEDD observers collected information on illegal harvesting practices, conditions of fallen trees, tree markings, health and safety of timber workers and instances of child labour. Reports containing the suspected illegalities and related recommendations were submitted to the dedicated review committee.

Technology for information sharing and transparency

The *Field Legality Advisory Group* also supported CIEDD to operationalize the Open Timber Portal (OTP) in CAR, an online platform making key forest data public. FLAG trained CIEDD members to manage the CAR data in the OTP, whilst CIEDD trained 10 local enterprises to independently upload documentation and legality certificates onto the platform. FLAG's prior experience in initially establishing the OTP in Cameroon was instrumental for the delivery of a precise, effective training based on recent lessons learned.

Building a regional network for knowledge sharing and collaboration

South-South cooperation initiatives around timber legality have been expanding to other countries in Africa. The Cameroonian NGO *Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement* (SAILD), for example, carried out several missions to Gabon to support the development of digital platforms for legal timber trade. At the time of writing, NGOs from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon and Uganda are also planning exchange missions to advance on shared forest transparency objectives.

Shared sustainable forest management objectives and strong regional collaboration have also led to the creation of The African Platform for Independent Observation (PA-OI). The PA-OI aims at harmonizing the methodology and strategies of IFM in Africa while bringing together independent forest observers and NGOs from different countries.

Since 2016, the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme has supported projects in 27 priority tropical timber producing countries throughout Africa, Latin America and Asia.

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